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# THE LARGER PARISH PLAN

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A MINISTRY OVER AREAS  
AS WELL AS CHURCHES

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## The Larger Parish Plan

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What is the "Larger Parish" plan? It is a plan which specializes in a ministry over areas as well as churches. This practice is not altogether new. Aggressive ministers have used the plan without troubling to give it a name. It is the old circuit rider system rejuvenated, brought up to date, and given a new emphasis and a larger usefulness. The minister who adopts the plan feels a primary obligation to render faithful service to a particular church and people. He is also swayed by an absorbing passion to serve over large areas as well. He possesses the vision of the foreign missionary and would pre-empt great stretches of open country in the name of the Most High. The limits of his "parish" or "community" transcend the narrow confines of village or town and reach out in every direction to include all the homes and peoples whose interests center there. The user of the Larger Parish plan recognizes that "the village church will fail that does not buttress itself up with a strong country work" and he establishes "feeders" by means of a regular circuit of preaching appointments, Sunday Schools, social and other activities. He looks upon his church as a force rather than a field and so measures personal "success" by an ability to lead the people out with him into a genuine program of rural and social service.

The Larger Parish plan uses the religio-social program. This is a church program which functions throughout seven days in the week, taking into account the whole man and the entire life process. Modern equipment is provided for ideal

worship and an efficient Church School. A like provision is made for well-supervised social and recreational activity. This is done, if necessary, under the church roof, or better, by means of an adjoining or nearby community house. Privileges enjoyed at the center are shared with outstations by means of extension apparatus. The religious-social program is in reality the church plus the Y. M. and Y. W. C. A., the latter being adapted to rural life and peoples. It places the church at the center instead of at the far circumference of things by making it a social as well as strictly religious center. There is a fundamental interest in saving souls. There is also the passion for saving men themselves and their environments.

**The Larger Parish plan is part of an evolution.** The old hoe-farmer of Millet's "The Man with the Hoe" has largely passed away and has become the machine farmer of today. Always the hyper-individualist of history and strongly intrenched in his own ways of thinking and doing, this modern farmer has new vision. He realizes that good farming demands generous co-operation rather than selfish competition. Farmers stand or fall together. And the farm task is become something more than a mere matter of getting a living. The individual farmer is privileged to unite with others in a patriotic effort to build up and maintain a civilization upon the soil. The community is the ultimate unit of interest and value. At this point the Larger Parish plan meets the farmer's vision and need. It gives him the Community Church. This is not necessarily the so-called "Institutional Church." The very name is suggestive of an ideal held in common with the farmer, and not a particular set of methods. The community church, also, is to maintain itself as a means to the

larger end of helping to build up communities. Its mission is to make country life healthy, happy and prosperous, the peer of any in the land. And the minister is no less a preacher and true man of God who becomes also an organizer, a social engineer, and a builder of communities.

The Larger Parish plan helps to preserve a sufficient population upon the soil. Here the rural church works at the heart of one phase of the so-called "country problem." The force which is drawing people away from the country is largely social. It is the lure of those re-enforcing institutions which rural peoples passively admit "Fate" has decreed should exist only in cities. Nevertheless, these agencies for good or ill are steadily creeping into rural life and regions. They are generally poorest of the poor, introduced by commercial interests and for revenue only. An unpardonable neglect also allows similar auspices to provide the places where youth, especially, is wont to foregather. And the rural church has done little but thunder against such influences in ways and to an extent which alienates young life, bringing forth a general complaint that "the parson and the church are dead set against anything and everything I most like to do." The Larger Parish plan fights evil and exalts righteousness with its religio-social program. It does it in a constructive rather than destructive way, with a program of "let's do" rather than "don't." The church becomes a powerful agency for making the boy and girl willing not only to grow up in the country but later on even to stay by the farm.

The Larger Parish plan works for quality rather than mere quantity of peoples content to stay by the country. Programs of Americanization are

interesting and worth while, but the United States will become most truly American as her populations are made and kept one hundred per cent Christian. The rural church faces at this point its most sublime opportunity as well as its most serious responsibility. It works at the source and fountain-head and has first chance at that ever increasing tide of young life flowing cityward. If it does not implant an unfailing bias toward religion and the church in the hearts and minds of country youth, what chance will the city church and other forms of organized righteousness have later on to establish and maintain the all-important point of contact and co-operation? Nor is the sentiment an idle one, "Save America to save the world."

The Larger Parish plan is neighborly and Christian and meets a needy situation with far-reaching results. In spite of the rural telephone, rural free delivery, and automobiles, isolation and loneliness still characterize life on the farm, especially amongst women and children. And yet the most frequent sin of the average rural minister and church is a dire neglect of farmstead visitation. Homes are allowed to exist under the very shadow of the village and its church into which no minister or church-member-visitor goes from one end of the year to the other. The habit of church going has been lost or it has never been formed in many portions of the land. Still more tragic—boys and girls are permitted to grow up without any religious training in the home. Some have never seen the inside of a Church School. The Larger Parish plan seeks to remedy this situation with an outstation work and by a program of frequent and systematic visiting of country homes. The enterprising minister discovers the fine art of

"brothering folks" into the Kingdom. He finds that just as truly as "a house-going minister makes a church-going people" so does a farm-visiting pastor and people build up a country church. Neighborliness and friendship beget their like and when the farmer moves to town he will make his church home with that group which showed an interest in him and his family while they lived upon the farm.

The Larger Parish plan is efficient and economical and is certain to be used in a coming era of fewer and better churches. It is not "standardized" but views "a situation to be met rather than a theory applied" and proceeds "from survey to service." Details of its application are worked out upon the spot and for the particular place where it is to be utilized. The plan is bound to be definite, constructive, and thought-through. It has an aim, fixes a goal, and is thoroughly workable by those who must execute it. Moreover, as the consolidated school secures for country youth a better educational equipment and abler teaching, so the stronger ministry of a church at the center can provide a more adequate religious privilege. The serving of large areas under joint auspices of "yoked" or co-operating neighborhoods does away with a useless and sinful duplication of churches and guards against neglect of isolated homes and peoples. A common budget enables the larger communities to bear the burdens of the weak, securing for the smaller communities a better ministry than they could or would get by themselves. Equipment for a socio-religious program can be owned together and used for the common good of all. The administration of affairs over the countryside by a Larger Parish Council, where each co-operating unit has exactly the same repre-

sentation and voice, is splendid practice of democracy in religion. Petty jealousies between neighborhood and neighborhood tend to disappear and wrong distinctions between village and open country pass away. Under competent leadership, which so large an enterprise can get and hold, even remote regions are welded together into one large community where the life is truly Christian.

**The Larger Parish plan offers a big job for truly big men.** As a plan it saves from aimlessness, which is often set down as ministerial laziness, and wins the reputation "among us all the parson is the busiest man in town." As a program it commands respect and wins a following from men who want above all things "a program" and one "that hits us where we live." As a vision it holds up an ideal to be worked toward rather than ever to be fully attained, and one which excuses no one from going as far as he might simply because he cannot go as far as he would. As a call it presents the rural ministry as a vocation for life, and as something too sacred ever to be "used" merely as "a stepping stone to something better." Work in behalf of rural America is to be loved for itself alone and as a sublime way of spending a human life.

**The Larger Parish plan gives value for value.** It asks no favor of sentiment, tradition, or ecclesiastical authority. The right of the rural church to be supported rests not upon what it is but upon what it does, and upon the ability to give value for value while making itself beyond any other institution in the community "a felt necessity." The mission of the rural church is to serve, to serve all the people, to serve all of their interests, and to serve all the time.